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SUBJECT: CODEL IMPRESSED BY OPBAT, STRONG BILATERAL
RELATIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: CODEL Conyers visited The Bahamas April 7-9 to review OPBAT operations and assess current drug and migrant challenges. GCOB officials led by Prime Minister Ingraham described the negative impact of the situation in Haiti on both OPBAT and The Bahamas. PM Ingraham stressed the GCOB,s cooperation with the U.S. in tax matters in light of new off-shore banking legislation being considered in the U.S. Congress. CODEL Conyers expressed their appreciation for OPBAT and the excellent bilateral relationship with the GCOB, although it was concerned by the situation in Haiti and the need for a new strategy on the war on drugs. Post transmitted this cable April 15 to CODEL Conyers. CODEL Conyers has not cleared on this cable to date. END SUMMARY.

Drug and Migrant Challenges
Highlighted

¶2. (SBU) A Congressional Delegation lead by John Conyers, Chairman of the House Committee on the Judiciary, visited The Bahamas Nassau April 7-9 after previously touring Haiti (delegation list in para 7). CODEL Conyers reviewed Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) fast-boats, granted by the USG under SOUTHCOM,s Enduring Friendship program, at the port in Nassau. The delegation also traveled to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) base in George Town, Exuma April 8. GCOB and U.S. law enforcement officials from the DEA and U.S. Coast Guard briefed the delegation on current drug and migrant challenges.

GCOB: Capacity-Building in
Haiti Required

¶3. (SBU) The CODEL met separately with Prime Minister Ingraham, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Symonette, and Minister of National Security Turnquest and Attorney General Barnett April 9. Prime Minister Ingraham lauded the &excellent relationship8 with the U.S. and noted the importance of the U.S. for The Bahamas, prosperity. PM Ingraham and others described the impact of the situation in Haiti on joint counter-drug efforts in OPBAT and the strains on The Bahamas, security, social and health infrastructure from Haitian migration. GCOB officials pointed to the need to improve the overall situation in Haiti to discourage drug trafficking and illegal migration. A Foreign Ministry official with on-the-ground experience described Haiti as &a black hole8 in terms of government capacity. Minister of National Security Turnquest noted Bahamian training assistance to the Haitian police force and support for Haiti through CARICOM.

PM: Bahamas Financially Transparent,
Facing Domestic Challenges

¶4. (SBU) PM Ingraham pointed out the GCOB,s cooperation with the U.S. in tax matters, as new off-shore banking legislation moves forward in Congress, and said he was

concerned about &guilt by association8. He requested recognition of The Bahamas, high level of transparency compared to other jurisdictions. GCOB officials also stressed the unique challenges of providing education, health and other government services throughout the widely-scattered archipelago. The PM and other officials challenged what they regard as the prevailing misperception within the USG of The Bahamas as a fully developed country which does not require economic assistance. They referenced the unique challenges of a small island developing state with varying levels of income and development among the many islands.

Other Items: China, Port Security,
Health, Environment

15. (SBU) Other topics discussed with CODEL Conyers included:

-- Chinese Labor: Referencing recent discussions with a visiting Chinese delegation, Deputy Prime Minister Symonette stated that The Bahamas will not allow a significant influx of temporary or permanent Chinese labor for the planned stadium or other future projects, with the usual exception of highly-skilled personnel not available in The Bahamas.

-- Air and Seaport Security: Deputy Prime Minister Symonette noted the importance of pre-clearance facilities for The Bahamas,s tourism-based economy. He pointed out that cargo passing through the trans-shipment facility in Freeport, owned by a Chinese company, is inspected in close cooperation with USG personnel.

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-- Health: GCOB officials informed CODEL Conyers about plans to expand health care benefits. They described specific difficulties with availability of diagnostics on outlying islands, noted their cooperation with CDC on infectious diseases, and cited as a success decreased mortality among infants with HIV-AIDS.

-- Environment: PM Ingraham said the GCOB was very active on the issue of climate change to avoid &impending disaster8, but called for U.S. recognition of and leadership on the issue.

16. (SBU) Delegation list:

-- Congressman John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI)
-- Congressman Lamar Smith (R-TX)
-- Congresswoman Donna Christensen (D-V.I.)
-- Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)
-- Bob Creamer (spouse)
-- Sean McLaughlin, Minority Chief of Staff and General Counsel, Judiciary Committee
-- Keenan Keller, Senior Counsel, Judiciary Committee
-- Alli Halataei, Minority Deputy Chief of Staff, Judiciary Committee
-- Cynthia Martin, Professional Staff, Judiciary Committee
-- CDR Kenneth Pugh, Attending Physician
-- Lt. Bill Wellman, Liaison Officer, Navy OLA

Media Coverage

17. (SBU) Media coverage of the visit was light due to the long Easter holiday and a four-day interruption in the newspaper publishing cycle. One April 14 newspaper article highlighted Chairman Conyers, statement to the press April 9 that the U.S. was ~ winning8 the war on drugs despite the massive investment of resources. It also quoted his remarks on the &the enormity of the challenge8 confronting the international community in Haiti.

18. (SBU) Post transmitted this cable April 15 to CODEL Conyers. CODEL Conyers has not cleared on this cable to date.

